



Testimony in Support of SB 168, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A RIGHT TO HOUSING

Dear Chairs Williams and Lopes, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Pia Baldwin Edwards, and I am a resident of New Haven. I'm writing to communicate my strong support for **S.B. 168 - An Act Establishing a Right to Housing**. This bill would establish a right to affordable and habitable housing for all Connecticut residents, as well as creating a housing committee to oversee the state's housing policies. Every American citizen should have access to a safe, affordable, and stable home. In a country of such prosperity and opportunity, we have a duty to provide those who have fallen behind (and their children) with the most basic and essential asset — a home.

Despite the morally unambiguous nature of a right to housing, an average of 2905 people go to sleep homeless every night in Connecticut. The COVID pandemic has exacerbated the homeless crisis by causing many people to lose their jobs, and it has made homelessness even more unsafe because people cannot wash their hands in the street, nor social distance in a shelter. It is our duty to protect and empower our homeless — who are disproportionately minorities, veterans, and victims of mental health problems — by giving them a safe place to live, in turn improving our state and country as a whole.

Homeless people are highly likely to be incarcerated (often because of anti-homeless laws like loitering prohibitions) and hospitalized (often for either drug abuse or mental health reasons), all which cost the state enormous amounts of money. Although no comprehensive study has been attempted in Connecticut, a recent study on homelessness in Los Angeles (which is also experiencing a homelessness crisis) found that the average public cost for a homeless person was \$2,897 a month, while the average public cost for residents in subsidized housing was \$605 a month. Providing housing for the homeless would actually save Connecticut money, as well as contributing to the state's prosperity by creating new workers.

Around 4,720 Connecticut public school students experienced homelessness at some time over the course of the 2018-2019 school year. Homeless children are absent much more than other students and do worse on math, reading, and vocabulary tests, according to a Family Housing Fund report. By leaving them on the streets and in shelters, we are sabotaging the next generation.

Scotland, Finland, and South Africa have established a right to housing. The government of Scotland, especially, has delivered on this right by providing subsidized housing to nearly all citizens in need. As a result, the proportion of people self-identifying as homeless has been drastically reduced.

In conclusion, I urge you to help address our state's homelessness crisis by voting to establish a right to housing for all Connecticut residents. All we need is 80,000 more affordable homes to house all those in need, and passing this bill will be an important step towards eradicating homelessness. Although recognizing housing as a right will not solve the problem of homelessness overnight, affirming the right of everyone to have a home and establishing a committee to oversee housing efforts will be a foundation for all future progress. We owe the countless people across our state who are needlessly homeless or struggling to pay rent, many of them veterans or suffering from mental health issues, more. I urge you to vote in support of S.B. 168 establishing a right to housing.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Pia Baldwin Edwards
New Haven, CT